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UNITED NATIONS OBSERVER GROUP IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The present report, which is submitted in response to the request made by the Security Council in paragraph 3 of its resolution 691 (1991) of 6 May 1991, provides an account of the structure and operations of the United Nations Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA) during the period from 30 April to 28 October 1991. It also contains my recommendations regarding the future of ONUCA in the light of the current situation in the Central American subregion and of the experience gained in the implementation of the mandate of ONUCA since its establishment almost two years ago.

Command, composition and deployment

2. In my report of 29 April 1991 (S/22543, para. 3), I informed the Security Council of my intention to appoint Brigadier-General Víctor Suanzes Pardo (Spain) as the new Chief Military Observer of ONUCA. Brigadier-General Suanzes Pardo assumed his command with effect from 17 May 1991.

3. As recommended to the Security Council in my report (S/22543, para. 30), ONUCA's military strength has been further reduced in accordance with the proposals put forward by the previous Chief Military Observer a.i., Brigadier-General Lewis MacKenzie. As shown in the table below, the current strength exceeds by 2 the total of 130 military observers (excluding the naval squadron) envisaged in my report. This is a consequence of the need for an orderly phasing out of those military observers who had already been assigned to ONUCA at the beginning of the current mandate. At the end of October 1991 ONUCA's military strength was 164, as follows:

United Nations military observers

Argentina	1
Brazil	11
Canada	24
Colombia	7
Ecuador	10
India	10
Ireland	18
Spain	30
Sweden	10
Venezuela	11
Subtotal	132

Naval squadron

Argentina	32
Total	164

4. In addition, four civilian medical officers, four medical assistants and four pilots contributed by Germany are currently assisting ONUCA in its mission. On 21 October, however, the Government of Germany informed the Secretariat that, with effect from the end of 1991, it would no longer be in a position to provide these personnel or the Dornier aircraft flown by the pilots. The medical personnel will leave ONUCA by the end of November 1991 and the pilots and the aircraft on 10 December 1991. Alternative arrangements are being urgently explored to replace this valuable support on which ONUCA has relied since its establishment in November 1989.

5. Fifty-six international and 86 locally recruited civilian staff members were serving with ONUCA at the end of October 1991. The total of 142 was slightly lower than in April 1991, when it stood at 147. In addition there are 20 civilian aircrew and maintenance personnel for four helicopters and a small fixed-wing aircraft chartered from commercial firms.

6. The current deployment of ONUCA, whose headquarters remains at Tegucigalpa, is shown in the table below and in the annexed map. The number of verification centres has been reduced from eight in April 1991 to three now, whereas the number of operational patrol posts has been doubled from four to eight, with the purpose of increasing flexibility and making better use of ONUCA's reduced military strength. However, this change has not produced the expected benefits and if the Security Council decides to extend ONUCA's mandate for a further period, the Chief Military Observer's intention is to

revert to the earlier system of deployment, with verification centres manned by the same military observers on a long-term basis.

	Liaison offices	Verification centres	Operational patrol posts
Costa Rica	San José	-	-
El Salvador	San Salvador	-	-
Guatemala	Guatemala City	-	Esquipulas Jutiapa
Honduras	Tegucigalpa	San Lorenzo a/	La Guarita Marcala Choluteca Danlí
Nicaragua	Managua	Chinandega Estelí	Potosí Ocotal

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a/ The naval operations centre at San Lorenzo is responsible for patrolling throughout the Gulf of Fonseca and the adjacent territorial waters of the neighbouring countries. It reports directly to ONUCA headquarters.

Operations

7. In line with the conclusions set out in my report of 29 April 1991 (S/22543, paras. 25 and 26), ONUCA's activities over the past six months have been focused, more directly than in the past, on liaison and contacts with the armed forces and other security authorities of the five Central American Governments. To that effect, ONUCA has increased its visits to, and intensified the exchange of information with, national armies and security authorities, both in the field and in the five capitals. It will be recalled that ONUCA was established to verify the five Central American Governments' compliance with two specific security commitments into which they had entered under the Esquipulas II Agreements, 1/ i.e. the termination of aid to irregular forces and insurrectionist movements and the non-use of the territory of one State for attacks on another State in the region. The added emphasis now being placed on close contacts with national authorities responsible for border control and security is designed to enhance ONUCA's capacity to fulfil that mandate. This shift of emphasis reflects the fact that ONUCA's role is limited to verifying that each of the five Governments complies with its undertakings, whereas full responsibility for detecting and preventing activities which would violate the two commitments rests with the five Governments themselves.

8. ONUCA has also continued to patrol sensitive border areas where violations of the Esquipulas II Agreements are most likely to occur. On the basis of its observations and its contacts with the national armies and security authorities, ONUCA has been able to assess the adequacy of security arrangements in various border zones. In this regard, the Chief Military Observer has established that efforts are being made by the five Central American Governments and their armies and security authorities to honour their commitments under Esquipulas II. At the same time, however, it has become clear to ONUCA that for a variety of reasons, the most important of which are discussed below, breaches of those commitments continue to occur.

9. Increasingly, violations of borders in Central America appear to be linked to criminal activities such as drug trafficking, smuggling of arms and other goods, cattle rustling, etc. In most cases, pecuniary rather than political motives seem to be the driving force, even if former members of irregular forces sometimes play leading roles. While existing throughout the region, these activities appear to be particularly prevalent on the border between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. In an effort to curb them, especially in the north-eastern part of the country, public security forces in Costa Rica were strengthened and reorganized earlier this year. They continue to carry out joint border patrols with the Nicaraguan army, in conformity with an agreement between the two Governments that provides for the establishment of joint machinery to help maintain peace and security along their common border.

10. While the re-emergence and apparent expansion of irregular armed groups in Nicaragua is a matter of serious concern for the Nicaraguan Government, there is not, as yet, any confirmed evidence that such groups receive external assistance in violation of the Esquipulas II agreements. In the light of the increasing risk that such violations might occur, Nicaragua's neighbours have taken steps to increase vigilance on their borders and to improve their capacity to intervene effectively if the need arises. Some measures adopted by Costa Rica are mentioned above. In Honduras, where the Government has expressed concern that the national territory might be used illegally by conflicting forces and has asked ONUCA to act urgently to forestall such a possibility, ONUCA has established an operational patrol post at Danlí from which vehicle and helicopter patrols regularly visit various locations near the border. The armed forces of Honduras have also strengthened their deployment along the most sensitive portions of the border with Nicaragua and have increased the frequency of patrols. Recently, ONUCA and the Honduran army carried out simultaneous helicopter patrols to investigate the rumoured existence of a camp of armed Nicaraguan irregulars on Honduran territory close to the Nicaraguan border. No evidence was found to corroborate these rumours. As regards Honduras' border with El Salvador, ONUCA has noted intensified patrolling by the Honduran armed forces, both on land and in the air, in the wake of incidents over the past several months. The ONUCA operational patrol post at La Esperanza was moved to Marcala in August 1991 to provide easier access to some of the more sensitive points on that border.

11. In trying to prevent illicit activities across its borders, whether originating inside or outside its territory, Nicaragua is faced with special difficulties arising out of the continuing reduction of its armed forces (now reported to number some 21,000), which are at the same time called upon to help restrain mounting internal unrest and violence. ONUCA has noted that some segments of Nicaragua's long and rugged land borders, as well as portions of its Pacific and Atlantic coasts, lack a permanent security presence and would thus seem to be susceptible to violations of the Esquipulas II Agreements. The Chief Military Observer has assured me that the Government of Nicaragua is cognizant of this problem and is making such efforts as the means at its disposal permit.

12. As for Guatemala, ONUCA's mandate confines its role to that country's borders with Honduras and El Salvador, which are rather far removed from the main areas of internal unrest in Guatemala and, therefore, relatively quiet. The rugged nature of much of these border areas would, however, make it very difficult for the Guatemalan Government to detect and prevent possible violations without a sizeable deployment of security forces.

13. As regards the conflict in El Salvador, ONUCA's observations have confirmed that neighbouring Central American countries are adopting measures, albeit with varying degrees of vigour, to prevent activities from their territories that would violate the Esquipulas II Agreements. However, the internal situation prevailing in these countries and the nature of the terrain condition their ability to take effective action. A further factor is that large quantities of weapons are in private hands or have been hidden throughout Central America and are readily available to members of irregular forces and insurrectionist movements. There has thus continued to exist a considerable potential for breaches of the Esquipulas II Agreements in relation to the conflict in El Salvador.

14. In spite of the reduction in the strength of the ONUCA military observers and air wing, patrolling on land, in the air and at sea since 7 May 1991 has been maintained at or above the levels achieved during the previous six months. Patrols by overland vehicles totalled approximately 270,000 kilometres. The ONUCA air wing now consists of two fixed-wing aircraft: a Dornier contributed by Germany and a Cessna 404, and four Bell 212 helicopters chartered commercially. The Cessna and the helicopters are used both for patrolling, often with the fast patrol boats, and for the transport of both personnel and cargo. At the request of the Guatemalan authorities, two of the helicopters were dispatched on a special relief mission to Guatemala from 24 to 27 September 1991 for victims of the earthquake that struck that country on 18 September 1991.

15. During the period covered by the present report, ONUCA received only one request for a formal investigation of an alleged violation of the Esquipulas II Agreements. This request, which was received from the Government of El Salvador on 21 May 1991, asked ONUCA to try to establish the origin of ground-to-air missiles of the SAM-16 type reported to be in the possession of the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN).

The Government's request was accompanied by a video cassette on which at least one such missile could be seen in the hands of armed personnel, said to be FMLN combatants. As Nicaragua is the only country in the Central American subregion known to possess SAM-16 missiles, ONUCA requested the Government of Nicaragua to make an inventory of its arsenals so as to establish whether any SAM-16 missile was missing. In response, the Government of Nicaragua informed ONUCA, on 25 June 1991, that it had carried out such an inventory and that all SAM-16 missiles had been accounted for and found to be in their proper locations. On 1 July 1991, a team of ONUCA observers was enabled to inspect and count the firing mechanisms of the SAM-16 missiles and, on 5 July, to count the missiles themselves. On 31 July, ONUCA observers were also invited to examine a certified protocol setting out the results of an earlier inventory jointly undertaken by officers from Nicaragua and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The verification team found no discrepancy between its own count of the missiles and firing mechanisms on the one hand and the certified protocol on the other. As already reported by ONUCA to the Governments of El Salvador and Nicaragua, ONUCA does not expect to be in a position to determine the origin of the SAM-16 missiles mentioned by the Government of El Salvador in its letter of 21 May 1991 unless additional information can be made available concerning possible sources and routes of supply.

16. As mentioned in my report of 29 April 1991 (S/22543, paras. 15 and 16), two more investigations remained to be concluded at that time. The first concerned a request from the Government of El Salvador to ONUCA to investigate the origin of a large number of confiscated weapons on the basis of a list of serial numbers attached to the request. In the absence of additional information, which was requested from the Government of El Salvador, ONUCA has not been in a position to initiate such an investigation and, unless the requisite details are received, the request will be considered to have lapsed. The second investigation concerned the origin of arms and war matériel intercepted by the Honduran army on the Honduran/Nicaraguan border on 22 February 1991. ONUCA is still awaiting information from the Nicaraguan authorities in order to conclude that investigation.

17. On 25 July 1991, ONUCA was asked by the Honduran military authorities to inspect two "Redeye" missiles that had been found by the Honduran Army as part of an arms cache it had unearthed in southern Honduras; ONUCA was also asked to witness and verify their subsequent destruction. Senior ONUCA officers examined the missiles on 26 July 1991 and witnessed their demolition by explosives on the same day.

18. On 21 August 1991, Salvadorian media reported that a large cache of arms and munitions had been discovered and seized by the Army at San Salvador. On the following day, the ONUCA Observer Group at San Salvador advised the Salvadorian military authorities of its readiness to inspect the arms with a view to establishing their origin, in accordance with ONUCA's mandate. On 26 August a team of ONUCA observers was given the opportunity to inspect some of these weapons. As already advised by the Salvadorian Army, the ONUCA team noted that the serial numbers had been obliterated on several of these

weapons. The Salvadorian Army also advised the team that some of the weapons, including six ground-to-air missiles of various types, had already been dispatched to a location outside El Salvador for possible identification. So far, ONUCA has not received an official request from the Salvadorian authorities to investigate the origin of any of the weapons in question.

19. ONUCA has continued to carry out informal investigations and inspections in connection with border incidents throughout the region. For example, ONUCA teams were dispatched to Colomoncagua and Mapulaca in Honduras, close to the border with El Salvador, on 27 and 29 July 1991 respectively, to look into separate border incidents which, in both cases, had led to casualties among civilians. ONUCA found no evidence to suggest that motives other than criminal ones had been behind these incidents.

20. About 9.30 p.m. on Sunday, 23 June, an anti-tank rocket, possibly of the RPG-7 type, was fired at ONUCA headquarters at Tegucigalpa. Eyewitnesses said that the rocket had been fired by two unidentified men on a motorcycle, from a distance of only some 25 metres. The rocket missed a window that had been its apparent target and impacted on the wall immediately above it, causing only light damage inside the building. No ONUCA personnel were present in that section of the building at the time. In a communiqué issued immediately afterwards, a group that had claimed responsibility for a series of bombings at Tegucigalpa in December 1990 identified itself as the author of the attack, which it described as a protest against the policy of the United Nations vis-à-vis "third-world" countries. The investigation initiated by the Honduran army is still in progress.

21. At the invitation of the Central American Security Commission, the Chief Military Observer attended its meeting at Guatemala City on 19 and 20 September 1991 in an observer capacity. In response to the request made by the Commission at its previous meeting, held at Managua in April 1991, which was attended by the then Chief Military Observer a.i., General Suanzes made an informal oral presentation, describing the nature and purpose of ONUCA's mandate and the results achieved to date. The meeting also offered a useful opportunity for an analysis and exchange of views concerning various plans and activities, currently under study or under way, with a view to ensuring peace and stability in the Central American region. The Commission welcomed a proposal, which had been worked out with the assistance of observers from the United Nations and the Organization of American States, for the establishment of a mechanism to verify agreements relating to the size of the armies and security forces in the subregion and their armaments. It decided to take this proposal into account in the context of a draft Treaty on Security in Central America that was proposed by Honduras to the Tenth Central American Presidential Summit, held at San Salvador between 15 and 17 September 1991, and then referred by the Summit to the Security Commission for study and consideration.

Relations with the parties

22. ONUCA's working relations with the military and civilian authorities of the five Central American countries continue to be very good. However, as indicated in my last report (S/22543, para. 20), not all of the Governments have been ready to provide ONUCA with rent-free accommodation, as agreed with each Government at the time of the establishment of ONUCA. One of the countries continued to honour its commitment to make rent-free space available for ONUCA's accommodation, although from 7 October 1991 commercial accommodation on a reimbursable basis has replaced this arrangement. Another country has reimbursed ONUCA for accommodation secured on a commercial basis at fixed rates of exchange, which effectively means that 69 per cent of the rent was paid by the Government. It is regretted that, in spite of representations by the Chief Military Observer to the other three Governments concerned, no payment has so far been effected by them. I have instructed the Chief Military Observer to pursue this matter with the Governments concerned, in accordance with the views repeatedly expressed by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (see A/44/874, para. 20, and A/45/832, para. 25).

Financial aspects

23. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of ONUCA beyond 7 November 1991, the cost of maintaining the Group for a six-month period would be approximately $15 million, based on the continuance of its existing strength and responsibilities. The resources needed for maintaining ONUCA beyond 7 November 1991 will be sought from the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session.

24. At the beginning of October 1991, unpaid assessed contributions to the ONUCA special account for the mandate periods ending 7 November 1991 amounted to some $9.6 million, representing 11.6 per cent of the total sum assessed since the inception of the Group.

25. ONUCA was originally established on 7 November 1989 for a period of six months and its mandate has been extended for three successive periods, each of which continued until the seventh day of a month. As the accounts of the Organization are updated on a calendar-month basis, it has been necessary at the end of each mandate period to undertake a complicated process of adjusting the ONUCA accounting records in order to establish the cost of the Group for each mandate period. If the Security Council were to decide to extend the mandate of ONUCA beyond 7 November 1991, it would be useful to take the opportunity, in the interest of administrative efficiency, to extend the mandate until the end of a calendar month. It is for this reason that I recommend in paragraph 30 below that the mandate be extended for a period of five months and 23 days, so that it will end on 30 April 1992.

Observations

26. Almost two years have passed since the Security Council decided to establish ONUCA by adopting resolution 644 (1989) on 7 November 1989. In this period the political and military environment in which ONUCA is functioning has been profoundly affected by a number of important developments inside as well as outside the Central American subregion. These developments have been almost all of a positive nature. Those Powers that were earlier actively supporting opposing sides in Central America appear to be disengaging themselves and have publicly announced their intention to revise their policies vis-à-vis Central America, emphasizing their support for negotiated political solutions to conflicts and assistance for economic and social development rather than military purposes.

27. On the regional level, 10 years of devastating internal strife in Nicaragua have been replaced by relative peace and tranquillity, recent trends notwithstanding. As for El Salvador, important progress towards a peaceful solution of the conflict there was achieved in New York only a few weeks ago. It is my fervent hope that the remaining steps necessary for the establishment of lasting peace and security can be agreed upon in the very near future. The ongoing direct talks between representatives of the Government of Guatemala and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca, attended by my representative in an observer capacity, offer hope for an end to the tragic conflict that has been plaguing that country for so many years.

28. In light of this improved situation in the subregion, the five Governments are making efforts in different Central American forums, including, not least, the biannual Presidential Summits, to arrive at new collective security arrangements for the region. I am confident that the five Governments will spare no effort to achieve rapid progress in this direction and that they will soon be in a position to dispense with the need for international verification of their compliance with the Esquipulas II Agreements. In saying this, I am conscious of the concern felt by members of the Security Council, and indeed by the membership at large, at the costs of meeting the ever-growing demand for peace-making and peace-keeping activities by the United Nations. It is also a widely held view that peace-keeping operations should be set up to do a specific task for a specific period and then be disbanded.

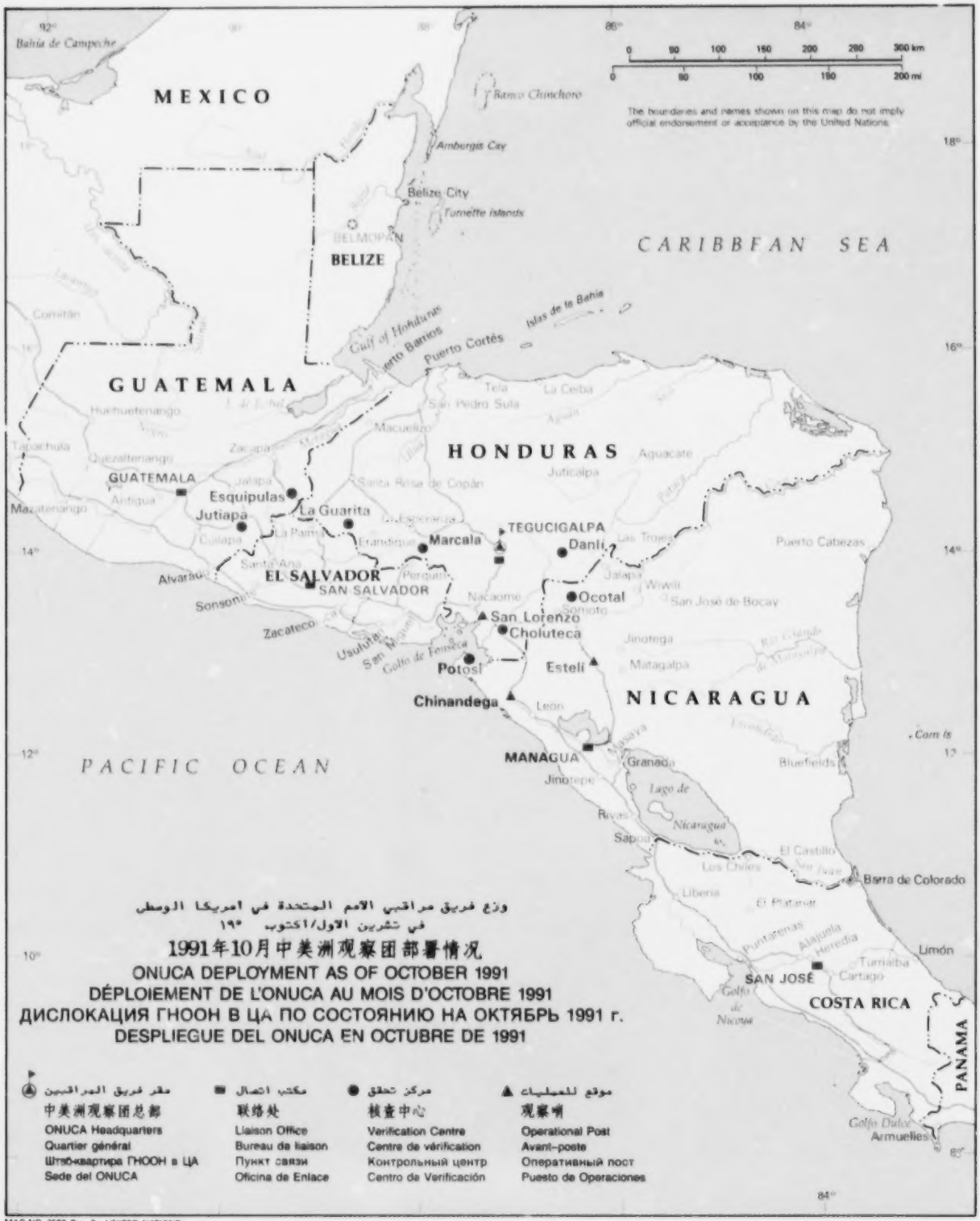
29. Meanwhile, the five Central American Governments have indicated their wish that ONUCA's mandate be extended for a further six months. I have reviewed this matter in the light of the considerations in the preceding paragraphs and in the hope that the peace process in El Salvador will reach an early and successful conclusion. In the present fluid and dynamic situation, I do not think that it would be right to withdraw ONUCA or further reduce the scope of its operations. But the Security Council may wish to request me to report during the new mandate period if developments in the region indicate that ONUCA's future should be reconsidered.

30. For the reason indicated in paragraph 25 above, it would be convenient if ONUCA's mandate could end on the last day of a calendar month. I accordingly recommend that the Security Council approve the extension of ONUCA's mandate for a period of five months and 23 days, that is until 30 April 1992.

31. In closing I wish to pay tribute to the Chief Military Observer of ONUCA, Brigadier-General Víctor Suanzes Pardo, who has commanded the group with distinction since 17 May 1991. Equally, I pay tribute to all the men and women of ONUCA, both military and civilian, for the manner in which they have carried out their duties during the mandate period that is now about to end. Their performance has reflected credit on themselves, their countries and the United Nations.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the Security Council, Forty-second Year, Supplement for July, August and September 1987, document S/19085, annex.



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